

# Decanter



Michael Apstein rates his favourite Louis Latour Corton-Charlemagne wines, from a 30-plus vintage vertical tasting spanning five decades, and highlights why these age-worthy whites deserve their grand cru status.

## TOP VINTAGES

My experience with these wines over the years show the beauty of this appellation. All these wines showed well at earlier stages in their lives. Some, such as the 1983, 1991, 2000 and 2001, while still rated today in the low 90s on a 100-point scale, are not in the same league as the very best. There were a few, the 1987, 1992, 1994 and 1998, that are now well past their prime. But strikingly, even in weaker vintages, Latour's Corton-Charlemagne shows the value of a top terroir and a dedicated producer. Despite the general repute of 1980, 1984 and 1993 for whites, wines from these vintages have developed beautifully and gracefully and remain a joy to drink today.

## FOOD PAIRINGS

As any New England-based wine lover can tell you, Latour's Corton-Charlemagne is an ideal match for steamed or boiled lobster. Keeping with the theme of rich wine and rich food, other excellent matches are sautéed scallops or chicken in a mushroom cream sauce. But a good argument could be made for matching the power and density of these wines with a garlicky shrimp scampi or for enjoying their splendid complexity contrasted with a simply broiled sea bass. As with all great white wines, these Corton-Charlemagne should be served chilled, but not cold, so as not to blunt their layers of subtle charm. And surprisingly, even many of the older wines benefited from 30-minutes or so of aeration in the glass.



VERTICAL CORTON-CHARLEMAGNE  
NOTES & SCORES  
MAISON LOUIS LATOUR

94  
pts

2 0 1 8

Though the vintage was warm and yields were high - not, one would think, a good combination for a vibrant white wine - the 2018 Corton-Charlemagne is just that. It is yet another example how wine made from great terroirs in the hands of talented producers can turn out fine even under adverse conditions. Forward and rich, though with surprisingly good acidity, it delivers hints of luxuriousness that will develop and become more prominent with proper cellaring. Its forwardness suggests it will be enjoyable sooner than my usual decade rule. That said, it reminds me of the 1985, which is still going strong.

Drinking Window 2026 – 2036

96  
pts

2 0 1 7

This youthful wine shows the expected pineapple-like spiciness buttressed by great structure and energy. Pale yellow, it's surprisingly appealing now, despite its youthful vigour. The sumptuous richness of mature Corton-Charlemagne starts to peek through as it sits in the glass. I'm sure that will develop and become more apparent thanks to the wine's impeccable balance and underlying crystalline structure. It was still fresh and pure the next night after being opened and refrigerated.

Drinking Window 2027 – 2040

95  
pts

2 0 1 5

The wine's pale straw colour and reticent initial impression announces its youth. The spice element is far more apparent than the melon-y one in this tightly wound wine. Beautifully balanced, it blossoms, but remains youthful, as it sits in the glass. Indeed, richness appears two days later. It has great energy, especially given the vintage. This is a classic youthful Corton-Charlemagne that is developing beautifully and needs another five years, at least. In a year not known for producing great white wines, this one is a towering success.

Drinking Window 2025 - 2030

96  
pts

2014

The light straw color and spiciness of youth bode well for this six-year-old wine. Minerals and pepper-like spice predominate while pineapple-like fruitiness lies in the background at this stage. The following night, more fruit elements emerge, while the riveting acidity keeps it fresh and full of energy. Its invigorating and lengthy finish amplifies all its elements. The wine's stature comes as no surprise given the success of the vintage for whites.

Drinking Window 2024 – 2034

93  
pts

2013

till pale straw in color, the 2013 is a surprising success in a difficult year. The richness that comes with maturity is starting to emerge and is nicely balanced by freshness and spice. Long and graceful, this still youthful wine is lovely to drink now. Even the next day, it showed its elegance and freshness. Latour's success in this tough year is likely due, in part, to a severe selection: they bottled only 40% of their production.

Drinking Window 2022 – 2027

92  
pts

2011

The 2011 is another surprise because it's the product of arguably the worst year of the decade for whites. Yet, at nearly a decade, it remains youthfully reticent with a still light straw colour and profile. The spicy peppery aspect continues to overshadow the melon-y fruitiness. Herbal, even minty, nuances appear in the finish. Brilliant acidity keeps it fresh. Less concentrated than the best years, it is nonetheless a great success.

Drinking Window 2021 - 2025

98  
pts

2010

The 2010 has a great presence and, along with the 2004 and 2008, is my favourite for drinking now. As would be expected with a decade of age, the colour has taken on a light golden hue and the bouquet is far more developed and immediately apparent. A mélange of ginger and pepper-like spice offsets a racy richness. An underlying creamy mineral-like component is clear. Its chiseled profile enhances every aspect. The 2008 is likely a hair richer, but this 2010 has a sleek elegance that is captivating.

Drinking Window 2021 - 2031

95  
pts

2 0 0 9

Latour's steely style explains why the 2009 is another success in a warm year not known for great white wines. Clearly ripe, but without a trace of over ripeness, it displays more pineapple than pepper, retaining elegance despite the richness. The winemaking team captured good acidity and energy - it still displays vivacity the next night - especially considering the vintage. It may lack the verve of the 2008 and 2010, but it is seductively luxurious and welcoming now.

Drinking Window 2021 - 2028

97  
pts

2 0 0 8

Despite its age, the 2008 takes time to express itself after pulling the cork. Amazingly, it improves as it sits in the glass. Golden yellow, the 2008 delivers a marvelous ying and a yang of white pepper-like spice and pineapple-like fruit. Its richness is fully developed and amplified by vibrant acidity in the finish. It has reached its peak where I predict it will remain for another decade at least.

Drinking Window 2021 - 2031

95  
pts

2 0 0 5

Though a dark straw colour similar to the 2004, the 2005 is riper, reflecting the vintage, with more melons than spice. Still, characteristic peppery notes come through nicely. Indeed, over the years tasting them side-by-side, the 2005 has always been riper and richer, while the 2004, racier and sleeker. Despite its richer presence, it retains vibrancy and is still energetic the next night. The 2005/2004 pair present an intriguing duality of style to consumers.

Drinking Window 2021 - 2026

98  
pts

2 0 0 4

There's no surprise here. The 2004 remains fabulous as it has been since release. There's hardly any sign of age, except a darker straw colour. Subtle spice and pineapple-like fruitiness complement its minerality. Paradoxically explosive, it exhibits real finesse and grace, befitting its grand cru status. Its vibrancy belies its 16 years of age. It was still going strong the following night, so I suspect this one will continue to give pleasure for another decade.

Drinking Window 2021 - 2031

93  
pts

2 0 0 2

The 2002 highlights a downside of vertical tastings. By itself, the straw-yellow 2002 is stylish and compelling. But it is overshadowed next to the 2004 and 1999, lacking the precision and elegance of the best. Still, at 18 years, it has marvelous depth and a vibrant balance of fruit and spice. Perfectly mature, yet not tired, it shows the stature of the appellation.

Drinking Window 2021 - 2023

100  
pts

1 9 9 9

Despite its two decades of age, the 1999 remains straw coloured and immediately fresh on the nose. Luxurious richness for which Corton-Charlemagne is known is front and center. Mint-like herbal notes and a firm mineral element add dazzle in the finish. Again, like the 1989, it's both refined, robust and full of energy. In my experience, it's been at its peak for at least a decade and shows no sign of fading. Although quality and quantity usually do not go together, Latour produced about 15% more in 1999 than their 40-year annual average of 48,000 bottles.

Drinking Window 2021 - 2028

95  
pts

1 9 9 7

The stature of the 1997, a not highly regarded vintage especially for whites, was a complete surprise. Dark straw without a trace of orange, it was amazingly and surprisingly fresh, displaying an alluring and balanced combination of pineapple-like spice and creaminess. Long and refined, I kept checking the label to be sure it was the 1997.

Drinking Window 2021 - 2023

95  
pts

1 9 9 6

A suspicious orange colour notwithstanding, the 1996, at 24 years of age, was a success both aromatically and on the palate. It was bright and fresh without a hint of unpleasant oxidation despite the colour. Rich and creamy, with nuances of stone fruits, its minerality was still evident. The acidity for which the vintage is known, has kept it vibrant. A different style of orange wine!

Drinking Window 2021 - 2022

98  
pts

1 9 9 0

The 1990 and the 1989 have long provided a fascinating comparison, with the former being just a touch riper and the latter a bit more energetic. At 30 years of age, the differences, though less dramatic, remain. The 1990, still straw yellow in colour, exhibits fresh, rather than dried, fruit notes, though nutty nuances appear in the finish. Its complexity is staggering. This refined wine remains balanced and fresh with a vibrancy that belies its three decades of age.

Drinking Window 2021 - 2025

100  
pts

1 9 8 9

Unbelievable! At 31 years of age, the 1989 retains a bright golden colour without an orange tinge. Displaying a subtle array of apricot-like notes, toasty nuttiness and delicate spice, it enlivens the palate with its amazing freshness. Each sip brings new flavours. Powerful and penetrating, this wine has both elegance and energy. You'd never guess its age. Paradoxically, it is both broad and precise simultaneously. Just gorgeous, even the scent from the empty glass is heavenly. It remains on a plateau with no signs of descending, at least judging from this bottle.

Drinking Window 2021 - 2025

95  
pts

1 9 8 5

Much like the 2018, the 1985 was precocious from the start. I never would have imagined its graceful evolution at 35 years of age. Orange-coloured now, it displays the panoply of mature rich flavours - dried fruits, nuttiness, and spice - yet the mineral-like aspect of Corton-Charlemagne persists. Its cutting cleanness, creamy texture and elegance still impresses.

Drinking Window 2021 - 2022

92  
pts

1 9 8 2

Clean and fresh aromas contradict the suspicious orange-y colour. An initial crispness on the palate puts to rest the fear that it is over the hill. Brilliant acidity balances nut-like nuances and dried fruit flavours of maturity. Similar to the 1978, the 1982 is, after 38 years, just starting to decline.

Drinking Window 2021 - 2021

96  
pts

1 9 7 9

The 1979 continues to outshine the 1978 and remains on a plateau. Orange in colour, it delivers a spice box of flavours along with hints of coffee and smoke. A refined wine, it remains balanced and elegant despite bombarding the senses. A subtle creaminess, not the butterscotch character of the other white grand crus, is alluring. Funny colour, but great flavours.

Drinking Window 2021 – 2021

92  
pts

1 9 7 8

The 1978, a favourite for decades, is now after 40-plus years, on its decline. This 'orange wine' still has good depth, providing nuttiness, dried stone fruit-like flavours, and an exotic twinge, all supported by lemony acidity. It's just lost the 'wow' factor and elegance that it formerly had. Still, I'd be happy to have another glass.

Drinking Window 2021 - 2021

